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NON-RATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS TOWARDS CONFLICT TERMINATION

by

Leah D. Johnson

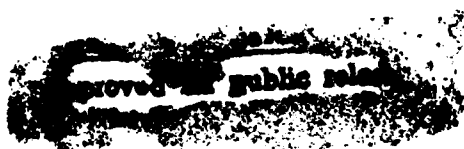
Lieutenant Commander, United States Navy

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

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Abstract of
NON-RATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS TOWARDS CONFLICT TERMINATION

Volumes have been written on the conduct of war while there is a dearth of information on how to resolve it. Not only is the military lacking in written doctrine regarding war termination, but it also maintains and precipitates a rather narrow view about war and its resolution. Conflict resolution does not simply happen as a result of a series of successful battles, yet this is how the American military plans, prepares, trains and thinks about war.

There are a number of rational and non-rational factors which contribute to the cause of war termination. This paper explores some of the non-rational factors which should be considered by the operational commander as he plans for, and participates in armed conflict. This paper is not a comprehensive guidebook for writing termination plans. Its intent is to focus on the ways military actions influence diplomacy, and to persuade the operational commander to think in terms of resolving the conflict rather than "winning the war."

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
ABSTRACT	ii
I INTRODUCTION	1
II CONSIDERING PEACE PRIOR TO WAR	3
III CONSIDERING PEACE DURING WAR	6
Overthrow/Capitulation	7
Concession/Negotiation	8
Perception	9
Media/Public Opinion	9
Morale	10
Targeting	10
Time	11
Allied Support	12
Empathy	13
Escalation	13
Military Reputation	15
Timing	16
IV CONSIDERING PEACE FOLLOWING WAR	17
V CONCLUSIONS	18
APPENDIX I--POST-CONFLICT METHODOLOGY FOR THE ON-SCENE COMMANDER	20
NOTES	23
BIBILIÖGRAPHY	25

NON-RATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS TOWARDS CONFLICT TERMINATION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"There are two things which a democratic people will always find very difficult--to begin a war, and to end it." (DeTocqueville)

Countless pages have been written on war--planning for war, war strategies, war battles, campaigns, weapons systems, logistics, causes of war--military doctrine is replete with guidance on how to conduct war--yet relatively little has been written about the ending of war. It was not until 1991 that the first mention of conflict termination was made in a military publication, JTP 5-0.¹

Termination. Military operations end when the objectives have been attained. The NCA define conflict termination objectives and direct the cessation of operations. Termination oplans are designed to secure the major policy objectives that may be attained as the result of military operations. Termination plans must cover the transition to postconflict activities and conditions, as well as disposition of military forces.

While JTP-5 calls for the development of a termination plan, which is of course important and necessary, this is only a small step in the right direction. The United States military still lacks guidance on the means of getting there. We do not need more direction on how to conduct war, we need direction on how to make peace. Although every war is fought in the name of peace, there is a tendency to define peace as the absence of war and to confuse it with military victory. Although

fallacious, this way of thinking is very common to the American military mind. We in the military tend to equate victory with the total military domination of the opponent. We assume that if we are victorious in battle, we will naturally win the war. In general terms, this is also the way we approach war termination. We design operational battle plans to successfully win the battle, and do not consider how our military actions will influence the termination of conflict. We need to stop thinking of war and peace in terms of black or white, that is, we are in one or the other. There are many shades of gray when moving from war to peace and vice versa. This paper will discuss various aspects of war which have a direct bearing on its termination, and which should be considered by the operational commander as he prepares for, and participates in armed conflict.

CHAPTER II

CONSIDERING PEACE PRIOR TO WAR

"The attribute conducive to peace is neither that popularly attributed to the ostrich, which denies the possibility of war, or that of the cynic, who considers war inevitable, but that of the rational man, who appraises the opinions and conditions tending to war and the direction of human effort which at a given point in history might prevent it." (Wright)

Just as policy is critical in planning for war, it is equally important in planning for peace. Policy objectives must be clear, definitive and obtainable and must be understood by both civilian policy makers and military operational planners. The selection of war objectives shapes the way the war will be conducted and drives the way it will end. A war fought in the name of limited, definable objectives will be much simpler to resolve than one with broad, far-ranging, or ill-defined ones. There is a danger in selecting unrealistically high objectives which may prolong a limited war by preventing serious negotiations and by causing the enemy to escalate force levels. Once the war objectives have been selected, the military commander and the diplomat must be cautious about escalating or otherwise changing objectives. This is an easy trap to fall into, especially if things are going well on the battlefield, as illustrated during the Korean War. An alteration or escalation of war objectives not only will confuse and divide our own war effort, but it also runs the risk of confusing and misleading the enemy into taking actions which lead toward a

more prolonged war. We may lose credibility later at the negotiating table if we do not stick to explicit, firmly established objectives from the outset and throughout the conflict.

War is a tool used by states to accomplish political objectives. War cannot be an end in itself; it must be the means to an end. It is towards the end that war plans should be made, yet we in the military seem to spend all of our efforts planning the means. Military staffs spend most of their time and energy planning the operational details of battle, and very little considering the strategy that will bring the conflict to an end. This is wrong. We must consider the end before the beginning. At the outset, we must have a clear picture of our political objectives, and a definitive plan for concluding the conflict. Failure to consider these factors may lead to an unsatisfactory conclusion as demonstrated by the Korean and Vietnam wars, and the Japanese in World War II. We must plan our operations so that they are most effective in changing the enemy's objectives, and thus lead to a successful conclusion. So, policy drives strategy, strategy drives operations, and operations should be designed to lead to a satisfactory end of conflict.

Before entering into war, a country must consider that the objectives for which they are fighting outweigh the inherent costs and risks of war. Once the decision is made to enter into armed conflict, it is done with the intention of "winning."

What "winning" means, is achieving the objective(s) which were identified at the outset. Winning a war does not mean annihilating the enemy. It does not mean total destruction or massive killing. Both belligerents enter into conflict with a set of objectives. Violence is employed as a tool to influence the enemy to change his objectives. So even though the enemy may have a much higher casualty rate, unless he has been forced to change his objectives, the war has not been won. This point was painfully made during the Vietnam war. Yet as much as been said about the "Vietnam Syndrome," the lesson we seem to have taken from that is that we should never again enter into a conflict which we cannot win, and we should use "overwhelming force" when we do enter (Weinberger Doctrine). We still think of peace as something that will naturally come along later as long as we conduct very successful battles in a massive show of force. We need to change this paradigm.

CHAPTER III

CONSIDERING PEACE DURING WAR

"Since war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political objective, the value of the objective must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in magnitude and also in duration. Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow."
(Clausewitz)

Many of the academicians who study war termination have developed mathematical models to calculate the point in time at which war can be terminated. They are called "rational" models because they take into consideration rational, or quantifiable factors such as casualties, or weapons expended. These models are designed to conduct a cost-benefit analysis, just as Clausewitz described; to determine "when the expenditure of effort will exceed the value of the object."¹ This type of model is limited however, because it is designed to calculate the optimal time for war termination, that is, it addresses the when, but does not address the how. The other factor which limits the value of this type of model is that it does not consider the "non-rational" considerations which have a major effect on the termination of war. These are factors such as morale, public opinion, and allied support. If the decision to end a war were simply to spring from a rational calculation about gains and losses for the nation as a whole, it should be no harder to get out of a war than to get into one.² The objectives of armed conflict often times cannot be measured

by the same means as the costs of war. Without a common denominator to measure costs and benefits, rational calculations are of little use.³ This paper will discuss the non-rational factors which should be considered by the operational commander, not just prior to war during the planning phase, but also during conflict, as military actions can have a profound effect on the success or failure of diplomacy. The operational commander must constantly assess and analyze the effect of his actions, and work in confluence with civilian diplomatic channels to bring war to an end. The operational commander must develop a more pragmatic approach when recommending force and requesting peace when victory is not possible. The commander should come to see success not as victory, but rather in terms of limiting casualties, sustaining public support, and minimizing the time involved.⁴

There are several options or methods for war termination, and there is a strong link between war objectives and way in which it is ended. That is, the way in which a conflict is ended is strongly dependent upon the goals for which it is being fought in the first place. It is important that both civilian and military parties understand these options and are in agreement about the intended course of action prior to the initiation of violence.

Overthrow/Capitulation. Historically, these have been the classic methods for the ending of conflict. Both belligerents entered into conflict with the objective of

completely defeating the other. War was fought until one side no longer had the will or the resources to resist and was overthrown, or surrendered, allowing the opponent to impose a settlement of its own choosing. Wars of this type usually involved massive killing and destruction, and basically boiled down to a battle of attrition--whichever side was stronger in terms of manpower and arms would be the victor. This type of conflict has become less common as time has progressed for several reasons: greater destructive power of weaponry, an incorporation of other tools of war--diplomatic and economic, a growing understanding of war in general and the futility of this type of conflict, and a developing view of this type of conflict as immoral or unethical.

Concession/Negotiation. The alternative to overthrow or capitulation of an opponent is to negotiate a settlement through compromise or concessions. Certainly the goal of a war for concessions is the negotiation of a settlement under advantageous conditions. This avenue does not seek domination or dissolution of the opposition; in fact, the continued existence of an economically and politically solvent nation may be essential for a stable peace within the regional power balance.⁵ While the execution of an overthrow is a purely military operation, in a negotiated settlement, it is imperative that diplomatic and military functions closely interact to bring about a successful conclusion. Since, in all likelihood any future conflicts in which the United States will become involved will

be wars of concession, the remainder of the paper will discuss war termination in this context.

Perception. Terminating a conflict is a complicated process. Several factors combine to impede hostility cessation. The first factor is the inherent uncertainty and risk in any military operation--the fog and friction of war. This factor is made more complex by the adversary's perceptions and calculations which may be different from ours and change over time.⁶ The opponent's responses are variable not only because there are many possible aims of a military action but also because the opponent might misinterpret the action, failing to discern its true aim. For example, deescalation may be the result of an exhaustion of resources, an effort to conserve resources for a prolonged conflict, or a signal of willingness to settle. Likewise, an escalation of conflict may be interpreted, and responded to, in a broad spectrum of ways.

Media/Public Opinion. With the advent of satellite communications, the media has become increasingly more influential in the conduct of war. Events are now reported real-time, and television broadcasts themselves have become a vital source of intelligence for both sides. The merits of this type of media coverage are debatable, but the power of the media is undeniable and must be considered by the operational commander. The media can be both ally and enemy to the operational commander. The media is the link between the military operation and the public, and public support is

absolutely critical to the success of the operation. Media coverage of the Vietnam War was a major contributor to the American public's disenchantment with that war. Conversely, the media was responsible for stirring Americans into a patriotic fervor in support of the Gulf War. The trick for the operational commander is to harness the power of the media and to use it to his advantage.

Morale. One of the most important considerations for the operational commander is the morale and welfare of his troops. Morale is affected by many factors including living conditions, public support, casualty rate and mission accomplishment. The morale of the troops has a direct bearing on their effectiveness, which in turn will directly affect the ability of the commander to conclude the conflict. If the adversary is aware of a state of low morale, this may be exploited by propaganda, or may result in desertion. The operational commander may have even more difficulty maintaining high morale after his side has entered into negotiations with the adversary. Soldiers have difficulty understanding why they should continue to die on the battlefield if their leaders are already talking of reaching an accommodation with the enemy.⁷ Troop morale is a very tenuous issue, but one with which the military commander must concern himself in order to effectively bring war to termination.

Targeting. When choosing a viable target, operational commanders should consider how post-conflict operations may be affected by the destruction of certain enemy capabilities.

Following the cessation of hostilities, the on-scene commander will be responsible for the care, feeding, sheltering, healing, and protection of the various populations. He will need viable communications systems, including television, radio and telephone. Transportation systems will also be critical. The stability phase will become dramatically more complicated if these services have been destroyed during the hostility phase. The enemy may have difficulty coordinating a successful cessation of hostile fire if his command and control capabilities have been destroyed.

Time. War by its very nature is destructive and has become more so with increasing capitalization and extensity of conflict. Therefore, it is generally desirable to achieve one's objectives as quickly as possible. As Sun Tzu wrote in 500 BC, "There has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefitted."⁸ Public and congressional support will not last indefinitely and tend to decrease in proportion to the duration of the conflict and the compilation of American lives. The United States is not prepared ideologically or morally to conduct protracted struggles unless there is a clear and present danger to national security.⁹ In Vietnam, the attrition strategy with its attendant high casualty rate eroded public support for the war before the insurgents could be defeated. In Grenada or in the Gulf War however, the military operation was quickly concluded and the political objective accomplished while public support for the intervention was still favorable. Another factor

to take into consideration when assessing time are the cultural differences in the concept of time. The Western concept of time is largely linear and progressive. That which is today will never be again; therefore, time must not be wasted.¹⁰ Other cultures have differing concepts; the Chinese tend to view time as a recurrent or cyclic phenomena. Additionally, they think in terms of decades and centuries where Westerners think in terms of years.¹¹ This contributes to a cultural impatience which influences the willingness of Western societies to wage war over time.

Allied Support. Many sources credit much of the success of the Gulf War to President Bush's superb ability to form a strong coalition force. As our defense budgets continue to decrease, the costs of waging war increase, making the concept of multilateral operations more attractive. The United States is no longer able or willing to be the "policemen of the world." The Bosnian crisis demonstrates our reluctance to enter into conflict without significant international support. Although we desire strong allied support before entering into armed conflict, it can become a hindrance when we attempt to resolve the conflict. All of the problems inherent to war termination are multiplied by the number of allied participants. Each ally will carry into the conflict its own personal agenda. It may be difficult to reach consensus on even the most basic of issues. Even if the United States does enter into armed conflict unilaterally, we have a responsibility to protect the interests

of our allies and to consider their political and economic security. The decision to negotiate an end, or to end a conflict must include allies, if the United States is to retain credibility and dominance.¹²

Empathy. War termination also requires a certain degree of empathy. One must be able to understand the perspective of the opponent if one is to conceive of terms to which he might be agreeable. As stated by Calahan, "First war is pressed by the victor, but peace is made by the vanquished. Therefore to determine the causes of peace it is always necessary to take the vanquished's point of view. Until the vanquished quits, the war goes on."¹³ Future conflicts are likely to be set in "Third World" countries and be complicated by cultural, social and religious differences with which the United States and other western military strategies may not be familiar.¹⁴ The concept of fighting on homesoil is one that is foreign to the American military mind. We always assume conflict will take place on foreign soil--we can only imagine what it is to have enemy soldiers in our backyards; our own homes and cities destroyed, and our own civilians killed, by the ravages of war. What we need to imagine, is how that would change the stakes in the minds of the enemy, and how that will alter their approach to the termination of conflict.

Escalation. Whether or not a nation can shorten a war by escalation depends on many factors. If a nation can overwhelm all of the enemy's forces by escalating a war, the fighting

will be brought to an end. Short of inflicting such total defeat, successful escalation would have to induce the enemy government to accept the proffered peace terms. Historically, when escalation--or the threat of it--has succeeded in reversing the enemy's determination to fight on, it has consisted of an extraordinarily powerful move.¹⁵ The trouble is, the greater the enemy's effort and costs in fighting a war, or the more he has "invested," the more he will harden his own diplomatic posture and become committed to his own conditions for peace--requiring a larger "return" for his "investment." For the successful termination of war, there is a very fine line between just enough force and too much. Bismarck was highly successful in achieving his political objectives through the use of limited and controlled force. Although the Prussian military campaigns with Austria, Hungary and France during the late 19th century were highly successful and would have permitted greater territorial conquests, Bismarck kept Prussian demands comparatively modest, with an eye towards post-conflict stability in the European balance of power. Bismarck understood that military "victory" was much more than annihilation of the enemy.

Clausewitz emphasized the importance of expectations in inducing the enemy to submit to one's will.¹⁶

"The disadvantageous position in which we place the enemy through force of arms should not appear to be transitory, lest the enemy hold out in the hope of a change for the better. If there is to be any prospective change in his position, it should be a change for the worse."

It would seem that a gradual escalation might be the answer.

A gradual escalation would not impose catastrophic damage, yet it would not give the enemy any hope for a change for the better. Why then, wasn't the Johnson administration's bombing of North Vietnam more successful? Because the escalation itself became a regular pattern that formed the basis for Hanoi's expectations, each increase in the violence confirmed those expectations; it did not change them. A reversal of momentum, or a departure from a previous line of march, is what is most apt to cause a revision of estimates and therefore a revision of diplomatic positions.¹⁷ Escalating war in hopes of terminating it is very tricky business. The military commander should be aware of the possible ramifications of such an action.

Military Reputation. The military reputation of a belligerent entering into war may have a great deal of influence on his willingness to yield to force. While neither side wants to be labeled as a "loser," a major military power has much more at stake in the way of military reputation should he be the one to make concessions, than that of a smaller, or minor power. The larger state must be concerned with demonstrating the ability to protect interests at stake in other, or future conflicts. For example, demonstrating the strength of the Red Army, as well as that of Stalin's determination, became important to the Soviets after the initial setbacks in the Russo-Finnish War. Some states may desire to engage in conflict with the United States because in doing so, they assume the underdog role. Whether or not they "win" is not critical; simply by

entering into conflict with the sole superpower they will gain prestige and bargaining power within the international community.

Timing. The correct timing for the initiation for negotiations is possibly the most critical aspect of war termination. This is because the window of opportunity is so narrow. The reasons for one side to welcome negotiations at a given time, are reasons for the other side to avoid them at the same time. That is, they are zero-sum: what strengthens the bargaining position of one belligerent weakens that of its enemy. The enemy's willingness to negotiate will fluctuate with the fortunes of war. He will be least willing when he has suffered recent defeats but expects his fortunes to improve. He will be most willing when he has enjoyed recent successes but anticipates future defeats.¹⁸ An example of this situation is described by Thucydides during the Peloponnesian War. In the seventh year of the war, in 425 B.C., the Spartans appealed to the Athenians--who at the moment had the upper hand in the war--to negotiate for peace. "If you do not accept the peace terms we offer you now", the Spartans argued, "you risk future setbacks and having to deal with us when we will be vindictive and more demanding."¹⁹ The Athenians, hopeful of further successes, refused and eventually met the fate about which they had been warned. Identifying that narrow window of opportunity when both sides see negotiation as the best course of action, and then acting on that moment are the most critical and difficult challenges towards the resolution of conflict.

CHAPTER IV

CONSIDERING PEACE FOLLOWING WAR

War termination must be concerned with the post-war political order. It is necessary to constantly remember the eventual reconciliation and the moral and ethical responsibilities that victory brings. Historically, the United States has addressed the post-conflict phase of war on an ad hoc basis. We focus all of our energy on the hostility phase, crossing the bridge of the stability phase when we come to it. In our most recent conflicts, the combat or crisis phase lasted for days while the stability and nation building phases lasted for months to years. Future conflicts are likely to follow this same pattern. We must train our military commanders to become knowledgeable about the peace time requirements which follow conflict and to understand how military actions on the battlefield can affect the peace that follows. Development of written guidance is imperative. Colonel Alexander Walczak has developed a ten-step methodology to assist the operational commander in restoring order and providing humanitarian assistance following the conclusion of armed conflict. It is included as Appendix I.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Since the goal at the outset of war is to resolve the political issues for which the war was begun, then the emphasis of military strategy must shift from its narrow preoccupation of destroying enemy forces to a consideration of how military means may be used to resolve political issues. Combat does not influence diplomacy directly; it does so through the intervening variable of a belligerent's perceptions, interpretations, and expectations. First, negotiation decisions are based less on past military activity than on expected future activity. Secondly, violence, destruction and other wartime losses are costlier to some decision makers than to others. Finally, armed actions are subject to a variety of interpretations, and to possible misinterpretations.

Because there are so many intangible variables to consider, governments find it extraordinarily difficult to calculate beforehand how a war might end. But they must consider the key uncertainties, so that they may weigh the risks of initiating (or prolonging) a war against the risks of settling with the enemy. This decision-making process must be a combined effort between the diplomatic and military elements. It is sometimes held that international affairs should be conducted on a clear-cut binary basis; matters of peace time relations are the realm of the diplomat, while the business of war is the responsibility

of the military. Rationally, we can see the problem with this argument, yet in actuality, the military can become very resentful of what they perceive as "interference" from diplomatic players. The mutual dependence of the diplomatic and military is inherently obvious. From the outset, they must act as a team, and realize their mutual value. The importance of high level dialogue and coordination between civilian and military decision-makers cannot be overstated. As Fred Ikle notes, "In preparing a major military operation, military leaders and civilian officials can effectively work together . . . to create a well-meshed, integrated plan."¹

This paper has discussed several of the non-rational factors which influence the conduct of war and lead to its eventual termination. The responsible operational commander must be aware and sensitive to the ramifications and influences of his actions, and must constantly assess not just how well they are succeeding--but how much do they contribute to the goals and objectives of the conflict. How do they contribute towards the termination of war?

APPENDIX I

POST-CONFLICT METHODOLOGY FOR THE ON-SCENE COMMANDER*

First: Determine the size of the belligerent and civilian populations in order to marshal sufficient resources for caring, feeding, sheltering, transporting, and healing of these populations.

Second: Separate out the combatants from the non-combatants. Then within each category break out sub-groups according to status: prisoners of war, criminals, refugees, asylum seekers, those seeking safe passage, and dislocated civilians. Encourage non-threatening civilians to voluntarily return to their homes. Assist them in doing so. Additionally, determine whether there are nay responsible skilled labor or others who can assist in rebuilding the infrastructure.

Third: Emergency humanitarian programs must be immediately implemented to provide food and water (acquisition, rationing, distribution), medical care and medicine, sanitation, transportation, and shelter (tents, fixed structures, or the building materials to construct them; heating and electricity if appropriate). Be mindful of dietary and clothing requirements and customs.

Fourth: Establish plans for law and order in the area

*Source: Alexander M. Walczak, Conflict Termination--Transitioning From Warrior to Constable: A Primer, (Defense Logistics Agency, 1992), pp. 31-33.

of operation. Locate and disarm all hostile military and police officials. Establish curfews and ordinances (for example to control travel, gatherings, fire arms, alcohol, and narcotics), if appropriate. Conduct joint patrols with local police members who are accepted by legitimate local authority. Additionally, execute plans to remove (arrest only if they have committed crimes against lawful authority) undesirables from area in order for legitimate authority to govern. Prevent looting of commercial enterprises, banking establishments, and governmental structures.

Fifth. Establish guidance and policies for processing requests for political asylum, temporary refuge, and safe passage.

Sixth. Develop a logistical system to continue to acquire and transport food, fuel, medical supplies, and shelter items. Provide refrigeration for food and medical supplies.

Seventh. Develop a health program to prevent communicable disease while people are living in temporary shelter, and facilitate rehabilitation of the pre-existing health care system so that it can assume the responsibility.

Eighth. Assist in the emergency repair of critical services. Assist in the repair or replacement of water systems, sanitation (garbage and sewage disposal systems), electrical and communication (telephone, television, radio, etc.), transportation (road, rail, ports and air).

Ninth: Develop an extensive information system to

communicate various information programs concerning policies and communicate various information programs concerning policies and governing rules and regulations to local population in English and the local language.

Tenth: Develop a transition plan to hand off the humanitarian care responsibilities to governmental or international agencies. The transition should be staged and placed under one point of contact to provide orderly assumption of responsibilities. Know the players: their purposes and authority, capabilities and relationships to other countries.

NOTES

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Chapter IV

Chapter V

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